Reflections on the Socialist Vision, the Crisis of the Soviet Union and the Socialist Transition Dilemma in Developing Countries

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Introduction

The "socialist reversals" in most of the Eastern European countries (German Democratic Republic, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, etc.) and the deep-seated crisis the Soviet Union is undergoing today have caused anguish and concern among the exponents of socialist theory who have/had been identified with or supportive of the so-called socialist camp in the world. Many are confused, some feel deluded by

past Soviet propaganda, and the unreconstructed believers of the pre-glasnost system are even angry with Mikhael Gorbachev and his policies of perestroika, glasnost and democratization.

However, regardless of how one feels about the changes that have taken place and are still unfolding in the Soviet Union and the rest of Eastern Europe, the "socialist world" and their supporters organized through the chain of Communist and Workers' Parties all over the world shall never be the same again. Moreover, the traditional ways of viewing what socialism is and how it can be achieved (as taught in the pre-perestroika days in Eastern Europe) require a great deal of *rethinking*. This rethinking must be done in the light not only of the politico-economic convulsions in Eastern Europe but also in the context of the changes that have occurred in the capitalist camp since the Great October Socialist Revolution in 1917.

This paper summarizes, in outline form, some of the author's reflections on socialist theory as practised by pre-perestroika Eastern Europe and Communist Parties aligned with Moscow.

1. No Ready-made Formula/Model for Socialist Construction

One of the most vexing problems confronting Marxist revolutionaries is how to build the new socialist society.

Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, who built a monumental body of literature on the nature of exploitation in the capitalist system, failed to outline a clear and comprehensive program of socialist construction and the ways of achieving it. The most succinct description of the future society that Marx and Engels envisioned is contained in the following quotations from Marx's *Critique of the Gotha Programme*:

> What we have to deal with here is a communist society, not as it has *developed* on its foundations, but, on the contrary, just as it *emerges* from capitalist society; which is thus in every respect, economically, morally and intellectually, still stamped with the birth marks of the old society from whose womb it emerges. Accordingly, the individual producer receives back from society – after the deductions have been made – exactly what he gives to it. What he has given to it is his individual quantum of labour...
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> In a higher phase of communist society, after the enslaving subordination of the individual to the division of labour, and therewith also the antithesis between mental and physical labour, has vanished; after labour has become not only a means of life but life's prime want; after the productive forces have also increased with the all-round development of the individual, and all the springs of co-operative wealth flow more abundantly – only then can the narrow horizon of bourgeois right be crossed in its entirety and society inscribe on its banners: From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs!

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> Between capitalist and communist society lies the period of the revolutionary transformation of the one into the other. Corresponding to this is also a political transition period in which the state can be nothing but *the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat.*[1]

From the foregoing, the following conclusions can be made: one, Marx and Engels foresaw the socialist revolution taking place in the most advanced capitalist societies, socialism being a more advanced socio-economic system which has to grow out of the womb of the mature capitalist system; two, before the full communist construction can be reached, a transition or transformation period is necessary, where the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat will play a decisive role; and three, individual producers or workers will have to be compensated on the basis of their actual contribution to production during the initial phase of socialist construction and on the basis of their actual needs during the mature or advanced stage of communist society which will see the all-rounded development of individuals and their full contribution to society's creativity based on their individual talents or abilities.

Marx and Engels did not live long enough to witness the growth of the capitalist system into an imperialist system and the formulation by Vladimir Ilyich Lenin of the thesis that a socialist revolution can occur in underdeveloped capitalist states, if they represent the weakest links of the global imperialist

chain of capitalism.[2] Thus, the classical thesis of Marx that the socialist revolution would occur only in the most advanced capitalist countries was set aside in the light of changes in the capitalist world and the revolutionary formulations of Lenin. However, Lenin and his Bolshevik followers retained and tried to further develop the Marxist concepts of a socialist transition period, oftentimes described as the 'minimum program' of Communist Parties, and the need to establish a dictatorship of the proletariat during this transition period. Also, following Marx's elucidation of the lower and higher stages of communist society, the Bolsheviks adopted the slogan "from each according to his ability, to each according to his labor" (instead of the phrase "to each according to his needs," which is supposed to apply to the higher stage of communist construction).

2. The Soviet Socialist Transformations and the Party of a New Type

From the very beginning, the socialist transition issue in the Soviet Union was a highly problematic and complicated one. First, it had, to begin with, no model or guideline to follow — except the short-lived Paris Commune of 1871 and the above-quoted views of Marx. Second, the revolution took place in a backward and underdeveloped capitalist country, which meant that the "higher" socialist formation envisioned by Marx and Engels could not evolve out of

the fertile womb of a mature capitalist society whose highly-developed productive forces are supposed to develop further under a socialist system. In fact, the problem faced by Lenin and his successors during the first two decades of Soviet power was how to catch up with the developed capitalist world, especially in the areas of industrial development, energy generation and arms production. And third, the socialist revolution was threatened by hostile armed forces within and outside the Soviet Union during the first few years of Bolshevik power. In 1918-20, the Red Army, reinforced by worker volunteers from the factories, had to wage a gruelling battle with the White Guards of the Russian counter-revolutionaries and the armed contingents provided by the 14-nation foreign interventionists led by the British-American and the German-Hungarian forces.[3]

Thus, the twin challenges that confronted Lenin and his supporters right after the storming of the Winter Palace were how to defend the Revolution, on one hand, and pursue the transition towards a Communist society, on the other.

It was under these extremely difficult circumstances that Lenin's "Party of a New Type," the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party renamed Russian Communist Party and later Communist Party of the Soviet Union, developed a near monopoly of power, which was exercised in a highly centralized manner based on the structure of the Party itself and the distribution of its leading cadres in various organs of

Soviet rule. Decades after, under Gorbachev's glasnost and perestroika, criticisms would surface in the Soviet Union itself to show that the present stagnation of Soviet society is directly traceable to the monopolization and centralization of power in the Communist Party, which led to the virtual outlawing of contrary views from non-Party sources and from minority elements in the Party, bureaucratism and commandism exercised by the Party apparatchiks in the management of the economy and other aspects of Soviet society.[4]

Historical circumstances allowed Lenin and his Bolshevik followers to stage the world's first successful socialist revolution. However, the difficult situation they encountered in the early years did not allow them the luxury of debating on what should be the shape and content of the socialist society they were going to build and to proceed in its construction in a relatively peaceful manner. Thus, during the Civil War years (1918-1920), the Communist Party disbanded the 1917 Constituent Assembly and centralized power in the hands of the Party and the Red Army at the expense of the Soviets. The slogan "All Power to the Soviets" referring to district councils gradually became meaningless as they were convened rarely and were later transformed into auxiliary organs of the Party. At the same time, the Party rapidly nationalized all major enterprises and imposed the system of confiscating and rationing of food surpluses and other commodities under the policy of "War Communism," a policy

which ruined the peasantry and led to widespread hunger.

Today, we learn from Soviet sources themselves that among the revolutionary contemporaries of Lenin, there were criticisms against such a centralization of power in the hands of the Communist Party. One of those who spoke against it was the well-known German Communist, Rosa Luxemburg, who wrote in 1918 against the Party leadership resorting to decrees in managing society. The following quotations are from Luxemburg's article, which saw print in the Soviet Union only in 1990:

> Freedom only for the supporters of the government, only for the members of one party — no matter how big its membership — is no freedom. Freedom is always freedom for dissenters. That is not said out of a fanatical sense of justice, but because that is the essence on which depends the reviving, healing and purifying effect of political freedom, and it ends the minute that freedom becomes a privilege.
>
> The tacit premise of the theory of dictatorship in the Lenin-Trotsky brand is that the revolutionary party has a ready recipe in its pocket for the socialist coup which only needs energetic implementation. Unfortunately, or maybe fortunately, that is not the way things stand. The practical realization of socialism as an economic, social and legal system is far more than an aggregate of readymade instructions which only wait to be applied. It is entirely veiled in the mist of the future.

The Bolsheviks themselves will not deny that they have had to feel their way at every step, to search and experiment, to try out one method and then another and that a substantial number of their endeavors have been far from successful.

No socialist party programme, no socialist textbook are capable of explaining what those thousands of concrete definite measures big and little should be like, the measures that have to be implemented at every step in order to introduce socialist principles into economy, law and all social relations...The socialist system should and can be only the product of history born out of its own experience, born out of establishing living history which, just like organic nature (part of which it actually is in the final count) possesses the superb quality of always simultaneously presenting real social demands and the means for their satisfaction, of presenting the problem together with its solution.

If that is so, then it is clear that the very *nature* of socialism precludes the possibility of its realization through decrees. Socialism presupposes a number of forcible measures used against private ownership and the like. It is possible to decree destruction and other negative measures, but it is impossible to decree construction and similar positive measures. Experience alone is capable of introducing corrections and opening new roads. Only an unrestricted and vigorous way of life is capable of producing thousands of new forms, improvizations and acquires creative strength and corrects false steps. The public life of a state with limited freedom is poor, meager, schematic and sterile because by excluding democracy it shuts off its own sources of spiritual wealth and progress.

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Socialism calls for a genuine spiritual transformation of the masses who have been degenerating for centuries under bourgeois class domination. Social and not egoistic instincts are needed; mass initiative instead of inertness; idealism that helps people overcome all sufferings and so on and so forth. No one knows that better, does not speak of it more convincingly and does not repeat it more persistently than Lenin. But he is wholly mistaken in his choice of means. Decrees, the dictatorial power of factory overseers, severe punishment and terror are all palliatives. The dominance of terror has a demoralizing effect. The only road to revival is through the school of public life, unlimited democracy and public opinion.

What remains if we sweep aside all the above? Instead of the representative institutions that have resulted from universal popular elections, Lenin and Trotsky have declared the Soviets the only true representatives of the working masses. But with the suppression of political life in the country, life in the Soviets will peter out as well. Without universal suffrage, unlimited freedom of the press and assembly, and struggle of opinions, life dies in any public institution and turns into its own imitation where the bureaucracy is the only active element. Public life gradually goes to sleep and only a few score party leaders conduct and rule with indefatigable energy and boundless idealism. Under them another score of outstanding minds really manage the country's affairs, while the cream of the working class are summoned from time to time to meetings where they applaud the speeches of the leaders and vote approval of the resolutions. The setup is actually

based on clique management; it is a dictatorship, it is true, but not a dictatorship of the proletariat, but a dictatorship of a handful of politicians, that is, dictatorship in the purely bourgeois sense, in the sense of the domination of the Jacobins (the Congress of the Soviets formerly convened once every three months is now convened only once in six months). More than that, such conditions are bound to make society uncivilized, to breed assassinations, shooting of hostages and the like. That is an all-powerful objective law whose impact no party can escape.[5]

Judging from the revelations that have come out of the Soviet Union during the last five years of glasnost and perestroika – regarding stagnation due to Party bureaucratism and commandism, the millions who died during Stalin's collectivization of Soviet agriculture, the millions who perished under Stalin's police-military control, the decline of social and cultural life, etc. – Luxemburg appeared a true prophet indeed. Moreover, she raised one of the most crucial issues about socialist construction: what is its true nature and how does one proceed to the realization of socialism whose entirety and complexity are still "veiled in the mist of time"?

The truth was that Lenin himself did not have enough time to sort out the answer(s) to this question as he was busy responding to the immediate needs of defending the Revolution against its internal and external enemies. He was one of the key architects of the policy of War Communism. But when he saw the imminent danger of the internal collapse of the coun-

try as a direct result of the widespread famine arising from the ruin of the peasantry under the confiscatory system of forced delivery of grain surpluses at state-determined prices, Lenin formulated the New Economic Policy (NEP) and vigorously persuaded his Bolshevik colleagues to accept a retreat to some form of "state capitalism" and "free trade" in agriculture as survival measures. In reality, the NEP, which some of the followers of Gorbachev have resurrected and emulated, was a formula for a mixed economy (nationalized industries side by side with "petty-bourgeois commodity production") and was seen by Lenin as a necessary transition to the socialist order that was still aborning "in a country where the overwhelming majority of the population consists of small agricultural producers." He asked for the abandonment of the system of forced appropriation of food surpluses in favor of a tax in kind imposed on petty producers who were allowed to engage in "free exchange," which, he acknowledged, means

> ...turning back towards capitalism. Free exchange and freedom of trade mean circulation of commodities between petty proprietors. All of us who have studied at least the elements of Marxism know that this exchange and freedom of trade inevitably lead to a division of commodity producers into owners of capital and owners of labour-power, a division into capitalists and wage workers, i.e., a revival of capitalist wage-slavery, which does not fall from the sky but springs the world over precisely from the agricultural commodity economy...[6]

The above quotation is doubly significant in the sense that it shows that Lenin saw the existence of a free market as some kind of a capitulation or a retreat to capitalism, a view shared by generations of Marxists. This explains the deep-seated belief that state ownership of the means of production and state determination of the prices of commodities on the basis of a central plan are the hallmarks of true socialism. Now that the Soviet Union and other Eastern European countries are switching over to "market economy," this traditional view is coming under a more rigorous scrutiny. While a few Soviet proponents are obviously advocating a shift to the market mechanism on obviously capitalist grounds, other Soviet economists are saying that the market system is, in fact, one of the achievements of human civilization and its integration and development in the future socialist order should even be encouraged.

It was clear to Lenin that the key to the success of socialism is higher labor productivity. During the NEP period, he exhibited great flexibility and pragmatism by not only allowing the rise of petty commodity production but also recommending the following: for "qualified and conscientious people" to go to the United States, Canada, Britain and Germany in order to master the latest developments in the "organization of labour" and "management" of enterprises;[7] and for factory management, like in the capitalist enterprises, to have relative freedom "to fix and pay out wages" and "manoeuvre, exercise strict control of the actual successes achieved in increasing production, in making

the factory pay its way and increasing profits, and carefully select the most talented and capable administrative personnel, etc."[8] The last three years saw Lenin grappling with the details of the dynamics of transition to a higher socialist order, which included a limited reversion to capitalism as in the liberalization of petty commodity production, learning from the best work methods from the capitalist system, adoption of the cost accounting system in order to ensure enterprise profitability, and the development of cooperatives.

As it turned out, the NEP saved the day for the young Soviet Republic as it helped stabilize the economy. Unfortunately, Lenin was already too ill during this period and could not influence the direction of the post-NEP period. When Josef Stalin succeeded in consolidating power in the late 1920s, he scuttled the NEP and implemented, fiercely and with the full force of State terror, a refined program of War Communism, which saw the rapid industrialization and collectivization of the Soviet economy for which millions of peasants died.

Stalin, the General Secretary, exploiting a resolution banning factions which had ironically been recommended by Lenin himself in the Tenth Party Congress, demolished all opposition to his leadership in the Party, which he transformed into a military-bureaucratic organization or to use his words, into an "Order of Sword Bearers."[9]

3. The Stalinist Socialist Model and the Crisis of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe Today

Today, the Soviet Union and the rest of Eastern Europe are gripped by an all-sided crisis which is universally blamed on the Stalinist or bureaucratic-commandist system developed by Stalin after the death of Lenin and transplanted into the Eastern European countries whose Communist Parties rose to power with the aid of the Soviet Red Army.

Ten years ago, at the height of the Brezhnevite era, Soviet propagandists were proudly proclaiming that they had already achieved the status of a "developed socialist society" — "the peak of mankind's social progress."[10] Today, with the signs of stagnation and crisis all around them, no Soviet politician or economist would dare repeat such a hollow claim. In fact, one of the debates going on in the Soviet Union is whether the system developed by Stalin and continued by Leonid Brezhnev was socialist or not. Yuri Afanasyev, a reformist historian and former editor of the Party's theoretical organ, claims the Soviet Union is not socialist, while another historian, Vladimir Sogrin of the Institute of World History, describes the Stalin-Brezhnev model of socialism as "barracks socialism," whose main features are: "gross equalization in distribution owing to the low level of productive forces development; suppression by the state of personal rights, regulation of people's conduct and thoughts; rigid subordination to the state of all social

spheres – the economy, politics, culture and ideology."[11] Another author, Leonid Vasilyev of the Institute of Oriental Studies, labels the system as "Oriental socialism," which is seen as a marriage of Marxist violence and Oriental despotism.[12] A People's Deputy of the USSR, Gennady Lisichkin, insists that what Stalin built was what Engels called "Prussian-type socialism."[13] A regular contributor to *Moscow News*, Len Karpinsky, describes "real socialism" (another term for "developed socialism") as "a verbal camouflage for a *privately-owned corporation* represented by the Party-state apparat – the real owner and controller of the people's property."[14]

What are the general characteristics of the Stalinist system? Many Soviet authors today do not hesitate to write about the negative features of the system over and over in the various Moscow publications. But here, it will be enough to quote from the well-known Hungarian economist, Tamas Szentes, who summed up the content of the system as follows:

a) the policy of *isolation* from and confrontation with the outside world, inducing the *militarization* of society, the economy as well as the political system, its institutions and mechanism and also the ruling party itself,

b) *etatism*, an increasingly alienated and concentrated State power oppressing the 'civil society', and individual initiatives, self-activities, entrepreneurship and creativity, and the concomitant policy of *voluntarism* applying

forced methods of 'primitive accumulation', accelerated industrialization and 'collectivization' both for the declared aim of socialist development and attempting to catch up with the most developed countries;

c) a monolithic, hierarchically structured *state-party system* with an antidemocratic, monopolistic exercise of power, decision-making, control and selection, the fusion at all levels of the State and the ruling party abolishing or reducing all other parties to a mere formality and condemning all social organizations and trade unions to the role of 'transmission belt';

d) an *ideological and cultural monopoly* with a similarly monolithic and hierarchic pattern of cultural life and ideological activities for the purpose of legitimizing the political power and its practice, and with the canonization of regularly readjusted pseudo-Marxist dogmas.[15]

Of course, the system is not devoid of its accomplishments. Again according to Szentes, the system led to "the elimination of backwardness, of mass misery, unemployment and illiteracy, the extension of social services, an increased rate of economic growth, etc.", while on the international plane, the system made possible "the rise of a certain countervailing power breaking the nuclear monopoly, and also affecting the process of decolonization, an impulse arising from rivalry or 'communist threats' in Western States towards the extension of domestic welfare measures

and toward international development assistance, etc."[16] As to the last point, what Szentes meant was that without the competition posed by the Soviet Union and other Eastern European countries and their programs on social welfarism, the tasks of introducing reforms and social rights in the Western capitalist countries as well as the decolonization of many developing countries would have been more difficult.

In fact, the Western capitalist states, faced with the challenge of an alternative politico-economic system promising redemption to the masses, have had to make continuing reforms and adjustments in their own system to regulate the "anarchies" and crisis explosions in the market as well as to give in to some of the popular demands from the masses under a liberal capitalist democratic order. The features of a so-called democratic welfare state – broad participation of the people in the political processes at both the local and national levels, social protection for the weak (unemployed and the aged), universal health care and education, etc. – are a far cry from the capitalist system that Marx and Lenin saw and analyzed. Moreover, the system has shown a great deal of dynamism as indicated in its ability to create huge mass consumption markets, integrate on a highly-competitive basis the most recent advances in science and technology, develop a corps of professional managers, design new ways of improving labor productivity, etc.

On the other hand, the Stalinist commandist-bureaucratic system was quite successful, in the early decades, in establishing the basic industrial structure of a modern society (steel, power, chemical and other like industries), wiping out the survivals of feudalism and monarchical systems, and creating a network of welfare services (health, education, day-care, etc.) for its populace. But as most of the Soviet economists now openly admit, such a system, with its tendency to rely on the "extensive" (and ecologically-damaging) mode of utilizing a country's resources, had long exhausted its potentials – thus, the revelation that the long years of the Brezhnev era were in fact years of stagnation.

The Soviet Union, due to the Stalinist system, suffers from anarchy of production and alienation of labor, two phenomena of capitalism that Marx predicted would be wiped out by socialism. This anarchy of production is easily seen in the oversupply of products consumers refuse to buy and the long queues for products that are in short supply. While the Soviet Union boasts of being the world's largest producer of tractors, many of those tractors often break down or do not work efficiently because there is a poor system of servicing them. As to the alienation of labor, this can be gleaned from the low level of Soviet productivity and product quality which means workers are not identifying with the products and production processes they are involved in. Abel Aganbegyan, one of the leading economists of perestroika, sums up the Soviet system of economic management as follows:

> The existing system of economic management, based on the command system, represses democracy, initiative and the creativity of workers and does not encourage the potential for work or social activity. It does not make workers interested in the final product of their labour. The unjustifiable levelling of wages, the shortages, the gap between supply and demand for individuals and society, the residual principle in the allocation of resources for the development of the social sector – these are all products of the old economic system.[17]

Thus, the perestroika revolution of Gorbachev is really meant to overhaul the Stalinist commandist-bureaucratic system. The problem, however, is that with glasnost, there is a bewildering array of proposals on what should be the direction of perestroika and the manner by which the changes will be carried out. The result is sometimes greater paralysis and confusion, and a crisis aggravated a hundred-fold by the centrifugal tendencies unleashed by the glasnost-perestroika-democratization changes. These include the independence movements in the non-Russian republics and the wholesale resignations from the Communist Party of demoralized and disenchanted segments of its membership.

In 1989, there seemed to be still some consensus in the Soviet Union on the following directions of the reforms:

> In the economic sphere it is development of a socialist market which is regulated on a planned basis, is characterized by a diversity of

competing forms of property (state, municipal, mixed, cooperative and individual), resolutely does away with monopolism, and establishes the priority of consumers' interests in place of producers' diktat.

In the social sphere it is the overcoming of the alienation of labour, promotion of different and effective forms of self-administration in production and outside it, the reaffirmation of every individual's personal right to his intellect and labour, elimination of levelling, remuneration in full-measure in keeping with the quantity and quality of work, recognition of the diversity of social interests, the greatest possible account of them and meeting them in accordance with society's possibilities, the strengthening of the sovereignty of social requirements and abolition of the "residual" principle in planning social development.

In the political sphere it is elimination of the gap between proclaimed social rights and their actual realisation, the resolute joining of socialism and democracy, transfer of state power, in all its entirety, to the Soviets, affirmation of the principle of the supremacy of laws and an increasing institutionalization of a law-governed state, promotion of a civil society that gives life to various public unions, associations and cells and paves the way, in conditions of socialism, to a combination of state government and self-government.

In the spiritual and ideological spheres it is guarantee of freedom of creative self-expression, competition in the realm of intellectual, scientific endeavour, development not only of parallel, but also of alternative varieties of culture

and public thought, which means realisation in practice of what we now call pluralism of opinion.

> The new model of socialism cannot develop in conditions of intellectual autarchy... socialism becomes richer by assimilating all universal human achievements and values.[18]

In the light of the experience of the Soviet Union during the last seven decades and the changes in the world during this period, it is fair to say that the directions of possible changes outlined above are the most realistic and humane targets. However, with the present crisis the Soviet Union is undergoing today and the debates within its Communist Party, which is bound to lose its monopoly of power once the overhauling of the Stalinist system is completed, it is difficult to say whether in the immediate future, a reformed model of socialism that delivers its promise can actually emerge.

In the meantime, most of the countries of Eastern Europe have already abandoned the Stalinist model in favor of a market and liberal democratic system patterned after the West. In these countries, the Communist Parties have either lost power or have transformed themselves into what look like clones of the Social-Democratic Parties of the West. These developments, which decades ago would have been branded as heresy by the international Communist movement, might indeed be interpreted as some kind of a return to capitalism. But considering that what is being left behind is a system that is not clearly

socialist, such developments are not necessarily backward changes. However, given the crises of the capitalist system of the West and the numerous social problems in the system, the changes in Eastern Europe are not necessarily forward-looking either.

4. Socialism: Is It on the Agenda in the Philippines?

The developments in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe clearly require a rethinking of the socialist agenda, usually expressed as the maximum program espoused by Communist and Socialist parties of developing countries, the Philippines included. There are many lessons that can be learned, and revolutionary perspectives have to be adjusted in the light of these lessons. The following is a short list of some issues that must be faced by both revolutionaries and reformists working for a meaningful transformation of the socio-economic system in the Philippines:

a. ***The role of a vanguard party*** — In any movement for change, more so a movement for an overhauling of a backward and class-divided society, the role of a spearhead, a vanguard of the most advanced or reform-minded elements, is a necessity. The question is whether "the Party of a New Type" developed by Lenin and transformed into a fraternity of "sword bearers" by Stalin, with its emphasis on monolithic unity and a great dose of messianism in the name of the working class, is the ideal model of a

vanguard. There is no doubt that the Communist Parties in many parts of the world, past and present, have attracted the most dedicated and self-sacrificing leaders and activists of the masses. A number of Communist Parties have great reason to be proud of their history and standing in society.

However, as exemplified by what Stalin did to the Party of Lenin, power-grabbers, terrorists and simple carreerists can ride on the so-called monolithic unity and democratic centralist principles of the Communist Parties to impose their narrow views of running an organization and a society. Sometimes, such developments can lead to mass disasters like the genocidal regime of Pol Pot in Kampuchea; in many cases, they can lead to the marginalized existence of ineffectual parties because their aging leaders, with their epoxy-type hold on positions of leadership, have failed to make adjustments in their analyses of society and continue to mouth old and irrelevant slogans.

Some of the weaknesses of Communist Parties patterned after the Stalinist mold are traceable to their weak practice of democratic principles due to strong emphasis on monolithic unity and one common interpretation of theory and social reality, one-sided practice of the outdated concept of democratic centralism, and tendency to excommunicate all contrary views.

Thus, what should be the shape of a vanguard party? How could a vanguard party internalize democ-

racy as a way of life while fighting for a revolutionary and democratic reconstitution of society itself?

In the context of present-day Philippines — where the main contradiction is that between the neocolonial system and the Filipino people and where the strategic task still is the winning of independence and the realization of the broadest democracy possible — what kind of a vanguard for change is the most ideal? A Communist Party? A Socialist Party? A Social Democratic/Democratic Socialist Party? A Labor Party? A Party of the Working Masses? Probably, the labels are not that important. What is essential is how a party is able to practice inner democracy with the same intensity as it preaches democracy to the outside world and how it is able to keep up with the changing demands of a rapidly changing world.

Also, it is important to take note of and encourage one of the most positive developments in the relationship among the left forces in the country in recent years — the tendency to come together and work on a common agenda. This trend towards coalition politics by left parties and groupings is aided by the increasing appreciation by all concerned groups that first, not a single party or group is in a position to bring about real change in society, and second, there are many commonalities in their agenda and perspectives despite certain differences in politico-ideological beliefs and organizational styles of work.

Indeed, the popular forces working for social transformation at this stage need to forge a principled

unity of a wide range of sectors comprising the Filipino people – workers in industry and agriculture, peasants, youth, women, urban poor, professionals, intellectuals, petty bourgeoisie, national bourgeoisie, religious, ethnic communities, patriots among the military, etc. – in a genuinely democratic and pluralistic process which may not admit hegemony by any one class or by any vanguard representing the interests of this class.

b. ***Longer transition*** – The transition towards a communist society is obviously a long and protracted process and the concrete features of such a society are still "veiled in the mist of time." It is also obvious that the so-called "socialist transition" consists of a whole series of transition stages, some of which are actually capitalist in nature like the NEP of Lenin or the recent economic reforms in Vietnam.

The "non-capitalist path of development" articulated by some Soviet scholars for developing agrarian societies as the transition model has now been abandoned as a non-workable program of transition as it is not based on the prevailing relations of class forces in many parts of the developing world. This non-capitalist path presumes that most developing countries are governed largely by pre-capitalist relations, and the transition to socialism can avoid the full development of capitalism through large doses of socialist assistance. Both presumptions are highly questionable.

c. ***Building the institutions of future society*** – Change does not come only after the assumption of political power and formation of a new political order by the popular forces. The seeds of broader social changes must be sown and nurtured in the ranks of the popular forces themselves long before the expected revolutionary change in society is realized. Thus, in the area of political democracy, the popular forces themselves, through their own internal politics and their present relationship with other forces in society, must be able to show that they are indeed democrats and believers in pluralism. Likewise, in the area of economic democracy, the popular forces must be able to demonstrate their own ability to associate and undertake economic projects in a collective, creative and scientific manner.

It is a hundred times easier to bring down a rotten system than to build and consolidate a new one on the basis of popular initiatives. The popular institutions of the future society must be put in place this early. Some of these institutions include the present-day people's organizations, non-governmental institutions and cause-oriented associations. Their own practice of democracy and associated work will indicate society's preparedness for a higher stage of social development.

d. ***Relationship between the State and civil society*** -- As the Soviets have found out late in the day, the State is not synonymous with the people

or with society even if the State officially proclaims that it is the State of the entire people.

There is an urgent need to study more fully the relationship between the State and civil society, before, during and after a revolutionary transformation of society. In a pre-revolutionary society, both the State and the civil society are arenas of struggle which require different organizational approaches. There is also a great deal of intermeshing between the two which needs new theoretical elucidation.

An appreciation of the State-civil-society dichotomy is most useful in a liberal democratic order because there are many possibilities for political and economic changes which can be advanced in a relatively peaceful and democratic manner. Like the market system, liberal democracy should not be seen pejoratively as a mere capitalist invention but as a historical product of mankind's continuing quest for a better society. A higher and more progressive society can be built not by outlawing the market and the liberal democratic order but by improving and expanding both in the service of the greater majority of the people.

e. ***The crisis of 'socialism' is not a vindication of capitalism*** – Despite everything negative said about the experience of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, it does not follow that capitalism has been vindicated. The critique of Marx that the capitalist system is a harsh, inhuman system based on the exploitation of man by man remains valid today. The

crisis of Philippine society, which has brought about the suffering of millions of Filipinos, is primarily a crisis brought about by this system. The debt crisis, the unequal terms of trade, the degradation of the environment, the rapid depletion of non-renewable resources, the prostitution of Filipino women and children, the sweatshop conditions Filipino workers are made to endure, the mal-development of Philippine agriculture, etc. – all these are direct consequences of a neocolonial capitalist system. The prosperity projected by capitalist spokesmen is a prosperity enjoyed only by a few, and realized at the expense of the many.

f. ***Is Socialism on the agenda?*** – In the Philippines, this question should not divide the socialists and socialist-oriented activists. It is fairly obvious that while the mode of production may be predominantly capitalist, the unevenness and relative backwardness of capitalist development in the country, not to mention the co-existence of pre-capitalist forms of production relations in some areas, prevents it from pursuing **immediately** a system whose productive forces are supposed to be superior to capitalism. The national and petty bourgeoisie have not exhausted their possible contributions to the country's industrialization and further economic development. The working class, on the other hand, is highly segmented, and the political expression of its potential power is highly fragmented.

What is probably needed is a scaling down by the socialists and their followers of their minimum and maximum programs of government to the level that is most realistic given the overall state of politico-economic development of the country and its position in the international community of nations. The struggle for a more democratic, egalitarian and truly independent Philippines will then have a sounder basis. But then this is something that should be debated, fully and democratically, by all the participants in various movements for social change in the Philippines.

NOTES:

1. Karl Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Selected Works*, Vol. III, Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1970, pp. 17, 19 and 26.
2. Y. Polyakov et al., *A Short History of Soviet Society*, Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977, pp.21-22.
3. Polyakov, chapter 3, pp. 69-110.
4. During the last three years, 1988-90, each issue of the *Moscow News* and *New Times* carried articles dealing with these problems.
5. Rosa Luxemburg, "Dictatorship and Democracy," *New Times*, Moscow, No. 8, 1990, pp.42-43.
6. Vladimir I. Lenin, "Report on the Substitution of a Tax in Kind for the Surplus-Grain Appropriation System," in Vladimir I Lenin, *Selected Works*, Vol. III, Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1971, p. 571. The report was made by Lenin during the Tenth Congress of the Russian Communist Party, March 1921.
7. Vladimir I. Lenin, "Better Fewer, But Better," in *Selected Works*, III, pp. 780-781.
8. Vladimir I. Lenin, "The Role and Functions of the Trade Unions," *Selected Works*, III, p. 660.
9. Leonid Radzikhovsky, "Testament: 120th Anniversary of Lenin's Birth," *Moscow News*, No. 16, April 22, 1990, p. 6.
10. An example of such propaganda is the popular pamphlet of F. Gelbuch and P. Lopata, *Developed Socialist Society: Basic Features and Place in History*, Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1980.
11. Vladimir Sogrin, "Socialism and Capitalism: Current Discussion," in *Social Sciences*, quarterly review of the USSR Academy of Sciences, No. 4, 1990, pp. 42-43.
12. Leonid Vasilyev, "The Second Revolution," *New Times*, November 6-12, 1990, pp. 30-35.

13. Gennady Lisichkin, "What kind of socialism have we built?," *Culture and Life*, magazine of the Union of Soviet Societies for Friendship and Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries, Moscow, July 1990, p. 21.
14. Len Karpinsky, "'Socialism' Awry," *Moscow News*, June 3-10, 1990, p. 7.
15. Tamas Szentes, "Radical Transformation, Democratization and Reopening in the East: Motives, Implications and Dilemmas," paper presented at the Washington D.C. Meeting of the IEWSS East-West Task Force on Seeking Security in the 1990s, June 7-9, 1989, pp. 3-4.
16. Szentes, pp. 4-5.
17. Abel Aganbegyan, *The Challenge: Economics of Perestroika*, translated by Pauline M. Tiffen, London: Hutchinson Education, 1988, p. 20.
18. Sogrin, pp. 44-45.

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